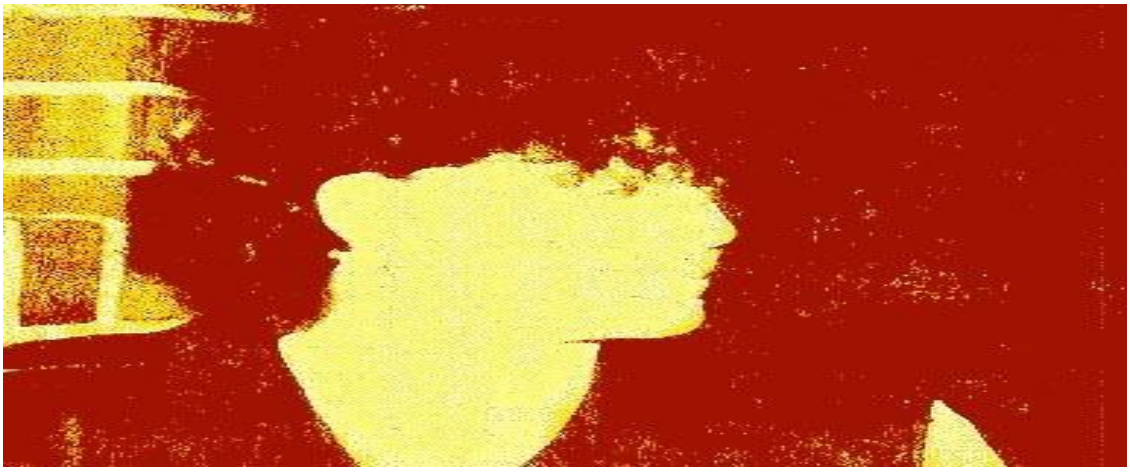

A MOUTH FULL OF CHEESECAKE.

By nudge squidfish

Flashback: Circa 1979 at the Northend Community Center, corner of Northwood & High. The first Nowhere show featuring the Screaming Urge, the Vorps, the True Believers, and Vertical Slit. Mike Rep just introduce me to Jim Shepard when somebody pinches my ass!

Arlus: Want a Hit?

(WHO THE FUCK IS THIS?)

Squid: Yea! (Thinking to myself; “Damn, they sure got some fine ladies here tonight. The other two babes are fine too!....Man, nice jugs! Whoa Squid, maybe you can score”??)

(Arlus sassily walks into shadows. The stage lighting splatters the hall in a misty-dark-pot haze of gyrating reds, blues, and greens. Sounds swooshing & swirling overhead as the Screaming Urge pounds the crowd into submission. I spy my drummer and bassist talking to Chris-the-Anarchist.)

Squid: Hey Tom, who is that girl over there?

Tommy Jay: That Arlus Stitch! She’s in the band called The Blunt Stitches. Those other girls, Dana Rashi & Jane Cassell, are in the band too!

Squid: Wow!

Gen. Robert. E. Lee: Ha..Ha..Ha!

Tommy Jay: Come on squid, let's smoke this backstage!

This is how I met Arlus Stitch, at Nowhere 79', organized by Mike Rock. At the time, she was in the Blunt Stitches, which, as far as anyone could tell, was an avant-garde "menage-a-trois". At any rate, there was this "house" owned by Chuck Kubat where the ladies rehearsed; no doubt being named after the famous "eclectic disputes" which occurred within the band. "Eris" never tried to hide the fact from the public that she was bi-sexual. This along with the fact that in Ronald Reagan's America, "feminist groups" that flaunted their left-wing philosophies in songs like, "Eat My Wad" & "These Hips Are Made For Humpin", were doomed to fail. There were "no venues" for punks like Rock, Rep, Shepard or House back in 1979, let alone radical bands like the Blunt Stitches! Undaunted, The Blunt Stitches staggered onward reaching their zenith at the Oct 4th NOWHERE 80 Show. Their performance was brick through a window designed to shock, mock and assault heterosexual new wave values. As noted by Buck Cancer's review in the Tet Offensive #5 (who compares the P.A.'s mix to a grizzly bear):

"as the Blunt Stitches mounted the stage and rattled their medullar chains the bear growled irritably, and ARLUS (vocalist stage center) belted it across the snout and put a knee to it's a large furry testicles. Most people were secretly grateful that the lyrics could not be discerned on such ditties as 'These Hips Are Made For Humpin' and 'Eat My Wad'". Around 1981 my marriage broke-up & I moved into the Blunt Stitches rehearsal space and found that the band was on the verge of collapse. Then as now, very few bands can survived in rock n' roll without the epoxy of cash. With such a radical political posture it's wonder they were able to last as long as they did.

Flashback- Circa July 1994. I'm talking with John Ballor of BUD and the painter John Piper, both of whom use to be Northend Community Center residents.

Squid: Yea, I remember that Eric Moore of the GODS stayed there too! That was a hell of an artist colony!

Piper: Well, they didn't want that kind of "freedom-scene" back then. They couldn't handle all those artist doing their thing, with no control over em- no way! Not at OSU!

Squid: What are you saying John? The Government Fucking Burned it Down??

Piper: Look, The firemen knew in advance that an arsonist was going to burn us out! They were hanging out over at the pancake house and when the first puff of smoke started, they forced us all out and watched it burn!

Squid: Is this true Ballor?

Ballor: It was a fucking set-up Squid! No fucking way did they not know what was happening!

Between the years 1979-1987, before her euthenic "ostracism", and before

“alternative” started taking off into 89’; Arlus’s was challenging artistic horizons! The Arlus I knew & loved was Poet, a Song Writer, and an OUTRAGEOUS PERFORMER who love to paint. She was a skillful “Punkologist” who pursued the discipline with rigor. Her compassionate political activist for Aids and Women’s Rights landed Arlus in plenty of trouble with an un-sympathic local government, while, at the same time raising the awareness in the punk community. Always the reflective philosopher, she was to me a “Cultural Icon”, trendsetter, and friend! She use to introduce me as her “Producer”, a title, which in all honesty must be shared with Chuck Kubat & Kurt Tuckerman. For, as far as I know, we were the only ones crazy & lucky enough to work with the Legend. In the early days of 79’ Jerry Falwell’s fundamentalistic backlash against affirmative action & homosexuality held punks in a death grip of conformity! Bands either had to pledge allegiance to God, Mother, and Apple Pie and were rewarded with access to “venues” & “media” or, they languished away in the land of “NOWHERE”! In reaction to this, people like Mike Rock, TKA, Chuck Kubat, & Ron House started organizing alternative venues & media themselves. Against this backdrop Arlus would flout always having a good looking escort on her arm, which in certain social situations back in 79’, got her thrown out of many allegedly public places. For example, we would go to Mr. Brown’s or Crazy Mama’s on the prowl, looking to get laid, and she would always score the one I was trying to hit on! I once asked her, hoping to improve my chances, what the hell was so great about sex? “It’s soft & gentle Squid” she said. “Women really want that”. “WOW” I thought!!! I’m out of touch here”!!

Flashback-Circa 1987 at Larry’s bar. We had just finished a recording session and pop in for a few brews. As usual, Arlus is paying my way.

Miss Trendy: Well Squid, I can show you a few tricks too! If you think you can handle it big boy! *(Winks & Laughs)*

Squid: Well, are you ready to go back to the Ponderosa?. *(She nods Yes!- THANK YOU JESUS! I’m in like Flynn!!)* Hang on love, I’ve got to go to the restroom…I’ll be right back!
(*Fatal mistake, Rule #1- never ever leave your date alone in the same room with Arlus co’s Arlus was always on “patrol”! As I came out of the men’s room I saw them slipping nonchalantly into the women’s restroom. At first I didn’t think anything of it, but then after about 5 minutes I noticed a few ladies were waiting to use the restroom. Finally, it struck like ton of fucking bricks…Arlus snaked me!)*

Squid: “Hey Arlus, come out, other people are waiting to use the Ladies”!

Arlus: “FUCK OFF”!

Squid: “Arlus! Arlus!”. We’ve got bladders too!!
(Next thing I know the bartender comes over to the door and knocks)

Bartender: “I’m going to call the police if you don’t come out”!

Arlus: “FUCK OFF”!

Squid: “He’s not playin, Arlus”!
(Well, they came out, Arlus smirking, walked right pass me headed out the door, and to add insult to injury, as Arlus passes me she give one of those naughty winks.)

The NOWHERE 79’ show was a mile stone in my life. I think the reasons it came together the way it did was because most of us felt cut off from society in that we couldn’t communicate how twisted & lonely we were. Most of us had been brutalized as children in one way or another. Some of us even tried to kill ourselves in response! For me personally NOWHERE made me feel connected and accepted. Ultimately, this brutalized group would go on to become outstanding artists in their respective fields of the 90’s.

Arlus must have been “brutalized” as a kid in the upper class Bexley school system for being bi-sexual. This is understandable given the cruel anti-bi-sexual attuide of the day. Being bi-sexual in Bexley in the early 70’s must have been a hellish experience! She told me on a few occasions that her father had a drinking problem and I saw a lot of pain behind her eyes as she spoke about him. I often wonder if he rejected her bi-sexuality?? She really hated to talk about dad. I think she may have felt guilty about his drinking. Like it was all her fault for being the way she was. On the other hand I could see that her mother greatly loved & supported her. The ironic thing is that bi-sexuality is probably a survival strategy of nature’s, in that the brain is probably hardwired for 3 different kinds of sex; heterosexual, bi-sexual, and gay. I’m figuring that back during the tertiary period when humanity was developing, survival was a bitch. It took a tremendous amount of resources for the female human body to produce and raise a child. Hence, the breasts stay swollen even after estrus so as to insure continued support from males by way of sexual excitement. On the other hand, it takes very little resources for the male human body to reproduce. Now during gestation, female humans where extremely vulnerable to attacks from competitors, so, nature, being the wise force of the universe, increased the odds for the species survival by developing bi-sexual & gay behaviors which in turn freed-up resources and aided in defense of the tribe. Isn’t it ironic that the behaviors that lead to human civilization, and were developed under nature’s auspices, should be ostracized as “UN-GODLY”? HELLO…,what the fuck is godlier than nature? Should we pretend to not be what nature has made us? Or should we pretend to be what we aren’t?? Maybe this was the cross Arlus had to carry? I’ll vouch that she never backed down from it, and in the end, society’s attitude “psychologically murdered” her for her honesty & courage! Don’t human beings need to be accepted & loved for who they are, and not brutalized for what they are not? Even the vilest villain can be contained, and within that confinement, be accepted & loved. Jenny Boyed, a psychologist from Arizona, who specializes in addiction treatment, once wrote concerning people like Arlus:

"Often musicians are very shy and introspective, so they just fall into drugs & alcohol as a social thing. But on a much deeper level, they use them to numb out a lot of pain, which often goes back to their childhood. I see how people fall into addiction because creative people are those who
recognize their pain & the pain they're exposed to concerning the rest of the world. What they try to do is blur the pain & concentrate on pleasure. They're trying to escape, but it doesn't work. It ends up being more painful".

Maybe Arlus tried to blur out her pain with heroin, and in the process alienated all her friends. However, the fact remains that she has left us a musical legacy, one which I believe was rich and varied. The first time I tried to work with Arlus was in 1980 at Tommy Jay's barn. I'm not sure if the recordings still exist, but I do remember Mike Rock, Dave Manic, Max Flash & Chris the Anarchist as back up musicians. This night stands out in my mind because we almost blew out Tommy's P.A. She could really stress the hell out of P.A. back then. I remember the meters glowing red as Arlus roared out "These Hips Are Made For Humping". What a "compunctious racket" Harrisburg Ohio must of thought! Yet, luck was on our side cuz back then they didn't have a police force. That night I began to see Arlus as the embodiment of the entire anti-traditional, anti-authoritarian youth movement. Her lack of pretension was an integral of the myth. If you couldn't accept Arlus's values then "FUCK OFF ASSHOLE"! This psychological form of escapism was the only real reality she could flourish in. Looking back I now see her body of work as profoundly emotional, darkly introspective, and bluntly shocking! Regretfully, I fed off her outrageousness, which must have been for her, a striving for acceptance & love.

1987 THE FINAL ABYSS

This was our first real studio recording together & it kinda of sums it all up. Me, Jim Shepard, Rudy (Rude Boy) Smith, and Roxanne Newman had just formed V-3 and we had this track that didn't fit the band, so, one day I ran into Arlus and set up a mobile session. Jesus, I remember both of us getting totally fucking smashed and spilling bleeding beer into my god-dam Teac 144 deck! In the morning, with room spinning & brain grizzle throbbing, I discovered that "Saint Arlus" had stayed up all night chasing her cats away from chewing on the cables. Hell if it had been me I would of fuckin crashed, but she was worried about more damage being done. Anyway, that night I re-discovered how hard it was to capture her voice on tape. This was to become a reoccurring problem throughout the rest of our sessions. It was always very hard to get her vocal clean cuz she love distortion so much. At times I thought she just didn't want people to hear the words and we never ever got it right on the first take like Shepard does. I had to bribe her allot. Also, I think the

tune romanticize death to the point where it may have become a self-fulfilling prognostication.

1987 AMY'S SONG

Arlus wanted to woo this army soldier back into her arms. She was real smitten over Amy, almost to the point of an emotional collapse. The thing was, this song shocked me shitless because it forced me into realizing that dykes were human and had emotions too. Arlus was suffering from a brokenhearted- wow I'd done that! Looking back, it ended up as sweet pretty pop song, and if you can get over P.O.V. it works nicely. However, I don't think Amy ever got to hear it.

1988 EAT YOUR BRAINS

I flipped out on this one man! Not only does Arlus the cannibal eating the lover's brain, she smears it on her breasts! Wow-a real mind fuck! It was "pot city" in the studio on this one folks! Funny thing tho, Arlus really didn't like pot as much as me. She preferred alcohol. During the session I noticed bruises & cuts on her arms. When I asked about it she shrugged "I had to deal with some cunts Squid. They were trying to rip me off." I knew by the look in her eyes it was a bad dope deal.

1988 TOILET BOWL

A consumer's guide to puking, as only Arlus can tell it! Man, her neurosis had reached new heights of abnormal behavior on this one; no doubt, heroin must have inspired this tune.

1988 I WANTA BE YOU

A jab at Columbus Ohio rock stars. I still think it is one of the most quintessential expressions of innuendo & isolation ever-perpetrated on tape. The song was recorded in two different segments and splashed together at mixdown. I had to twist Arlus's arm cuz she didn't like synthesizers all that much. She was always a guitar head. The vocal has a taunting dark edge, which I attribute to the lack of artistic acknowledgement.

1988 LEFT MY HEART

This song features Tommy Jay (drums) & Jerry Felty (bass). At the time I thought Arlus wrote this but later I discovered that Jeri Rossi put it out in Denver in 1984 as a 7-inch. Lynn Whitacre was probably Arlus closest friend and I remember her shooting a live video of this song in my attic studio. Also, I remember Arlus being into the bondage trip with whips & chains, while trying like hell to kick heroin. Moreover, during breaks She use to love peeking through the keyhole while hangers-on were peeing. Anyway, one day out of the blue she shows up with her heroin dealer (who died one year before she did) to do a mixdown of this song. They were both 9 sails to the wind and I started to stress about this cat ripping me off. From that point on I made sure that she was always alone when we worked. After her death in 95' I ran into this homeless street person who related the story of how Arlus fed & sheltered him for a few days until he could score this job. She didn't know him from shit but felt sorry for him cuz he was begging for food. This story really floored me cuz I knew I could never do shit like that. It showed me whole another side of Arlus!

1989 IT IS TO LAUGH

With this song Arlus acknowledges her wild & wicked ways by public proclamation. I remember watching her and thinking, "My god, she's telling the whole planet to stuff it"!

1989 CALIFORNIA SONG

She had finessed me into going out to see Larry Altvater in San Francisco. Larry had no idea I was coming! Arlus insisted it would be fine and I believed her!! Sorry Larry. Also, our friend California was in a coma so we sent it out to him.

1989 WOMEN'S LIBERATION

A political song about equal rights for women. She means every word!

1989 MY FACE IS FULL OF TEARS

Arlus started to increase her substance abuse & it was becoming very difficult to get any work done. When we recorded this song I could sense a shit load of pain but she kept refusing to back off the edge. One night at Dan Cummings house I watched her and a lover share some needles of heroin. I almost shit my pants when I saw the blood zip up into the needle. I told her that if she wanted to do more recording with me then there would be no booze or drugs in my studio. It didn't work! She just started to record with Kurt Tuckerman instead. Maybe she had become frustrated with my methods? I can be a real prick with friends, especially if I feel they are treating me unjustly. She was always bitching about having a live band back her and I had no way of handling a live band in my attic. The song I like best from Kurt's sessions was a James Brown tune called "IT'S A MANS MANS MANS WORLD" which, I think she had heard Jeri Rossi do back in 1984.

1990 BACKEND

Deals with a drug party in someone's backyard and features Tommy Jay on drums. About this time Gregg Casey had gotten Arlus into a treatment program and for a while it seemed as if she was going to make it. Then one day I get this frantic call from Arlus and she saying she is HIV positive and is dying from cancer! So I rush out into the freezing snow only to discover she's in party mode (big time!) and wants to borrow $50 bucks! We never got another chance to re-do the vocals on this one and I do regret that.

1991 SEARCH FOR MISERY

The most powerful song I ever recorded with her and features Tommy Jay (drums) & Jerry Felty (bass). It's sort of a cry for un-wanted help with the dichotomy being between the pain & pleasure of drug abuse. Around this time she started to prostitute for heroin, or if that didn't work she'd steal. We re-did these vocals 4 or 5 times cuz she'd show up so stoned she could hardly talk. Finally, I told her no more recording on junk or booze! Again, she went elsewhere to record her songs soliciting Tommy Jay & Jerry Felty support but the booze & junk blocked her and nothing got done. By this time even Darren Mcqueen & Bob Kat had thrown in the towel on Arlus.

1991 NO MORE LIES

Arlus came round and had kicked all drugs. She wanted to do a "hillbilly dyke love song". Wow- now that's strange; but I didn't think she could, so I was real pleased when she pulled the rabbit out of the hat! The song features Hippy Dave l on violins & fake mandolin and was easy session to do. Arlus was a joy to work with when she was straight and I thought we'd turn the corner for good. We even talked about putting out an LP

1992 SANDBOX DREAMING

A romantic song about shattered dreams with Arlus taking us on a grand tour of her lost childhood. This is pure Arlus coming through; beautiful, innocent & lonely, and I

think it was the best of all her work. Sadly, it was the last time we would ever work together. Shortly after doing this session her father died and things began to fall apart.

In 1993 word reached me that Arlus was back on junk. Things had become too dangerous in coping with her. She was now stealing from friends to maintain the habit. Rumors were flying and she had been caught in so many lies that I broke off the relationship. I was hearing stories of street fights, breaking & entering, prostitution. I think what may have broken the camel's back was the death of her father. My impression is that there might not of been any closure in that relationship. I don't think he ever accepted the dyke life style. This would account for the sudden turn-about in her behavior. In January of 95' I saw Arlus for the last time at the Great Plains re-union show. I was doing a mobile recording that night when Arlus comes up to me and says, "I still love you Squid even if you don't want to be my friend". Then she hugged & kissed me and walked back into the shadows. She loved to hug & kiss people, it was her trademark! I felt like a jerk for stonewalling her but she gave you no choice. If you play by her rules you'd crash & burn. Maybe she finally got overwhelm by Middle American values? I think she really did want a musical career, it's just that she really never believed in her art and I suppose that's good. Cuz if she would have been successful, like Rep, House, or Shepard, she would have been dead a hell of a lot sooner! And, most likely there would be less songs, and no doubt, she would have taken a few of us with her!

Flashback: Circa 1995 at Milo Artist's Community. Hippy Dave is knocking at my door and I'm hung over.

Squid: Who is it?

Dave: Squid I need to talk to you. (I open the door.)

Squid: What's up Dave?

Dave: Have you heard? Arlus is Dead!

Squid: Bullshit! It's another wolf story Immel!

Dave: No man...she OD at Taco Bell yesterday!

Squid: Arlus can't die! She's a legend. I've seen her cheat death too many times!

Dave: No dude, this time it's for real. Greg talked to her mother…she's dead. It was the fucking heroin! We all knew that sooner or later it would catch up to her.
(POW. The look in Dave's eyes told me she was gone forever.)

Arlus was a rebel in every sense of the word. Musically, politically, culturally and especially socially! But through it all she was REAL! Fessing up to her flaws, showing great compassion for the under-dog, standing up for her beliefs! In the end she must have realized how much her principles meant to her. If she felt she had nothing left to live for it must have been based on the notion that a life without principles ain't fucking worth shit! No one will ever know if her death was an accident or suicide. However, everyone who knew her was aware of the image or fashion statement of death that she projected!

In the end, on February 28th, 1995 Arlus Stitch was found dead in the Taco Bell's women's bathroom at Hudson & High Street in Columbus, Ohio. Judging from my experience, I'd say it was by design, not error. Goodbye my friend, I'll miss you.

ENJOY HER MUSIC
Nudge Squidfish 1996